DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 799 CE 057 026

TITLE	The Moon Also Has Her Own Light. The Struggle To Build a Women's Consciousness among Nicaraguan Farmworkers.
INSTITUTION	International Council for Adult Education, Toronto (Ontario).; Nicaraguan Association of Rural Workers.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-920907-07-5
PUB DATE	89
NOTE	63p.; Financial support from Agricultural Missions (USA), Anglican Church of Canada, OXFAM Canada, NOVIB (Netherlands), Presbyterian Church (USA), Presbyterian Church of Canada, Swedish International Development Authority, and United Church of Canada. Photographs will not reproduce well.
AVAILABLE FROM	Women's Program, International Council for Adult Education, 394 Euclid Avenue, Suite 308, Toronto, Ontario M6G 2S9 ($6.50).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; *Agricultural Laborers; Collective Bargaining; *Consciousness Raising; Developing Nations; *Employed Women; Equal Opportunities (Jobs); Farm Labor; Farm Occupations; Feminism; Foreign Countries; *Labor Education; Sex Discrimination; *Sex Fairness; Union Members; *Unions; Womens Education; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	*Nicaragua

ABSTRACT

This booklet is a collection of analyses and reflections by women who have worked with the Women's Secretariat of the Nicaraguan Association of Rural Workers (ATC) at the different stages of conception and implementation. "Ending the Myth of the Weaker Sex" (Ana Criquillon) provides the history of the women's program within the ATC. It identifies the need to incorporate women into agricultural jobs. Next, the article describes the three-stage project undertaken in 1983: a preliminary diagnosis that showed division of labor according to gender as the main obstacle confronting women; training of promoters through the organization of grassroots women's workshops; and a phase of action research. The article discusses the union's adoption of the resolutions that set forth women's demands and incorporation of the demands in collective agreements. "Linking Production and Reproduction: Popular Education in Action," based on an interview with Clara Murguialday, describes the publication, "Vamos," developed for use in workshops on work norms or standards. These sections of "Vamos" are highlighted: understanding work norms; defining problems; and searching for solutions. Photographs and text from the publication are provided. "Reflecting on the Process," based on an interview with Heliette Ehlers, addresses challenges facing the women's movement, lessons learned on how to organize women, and success in changing men's consciousness. (YLB)

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The struggle to build a women's consciousness among Nicaraguan farmworkers

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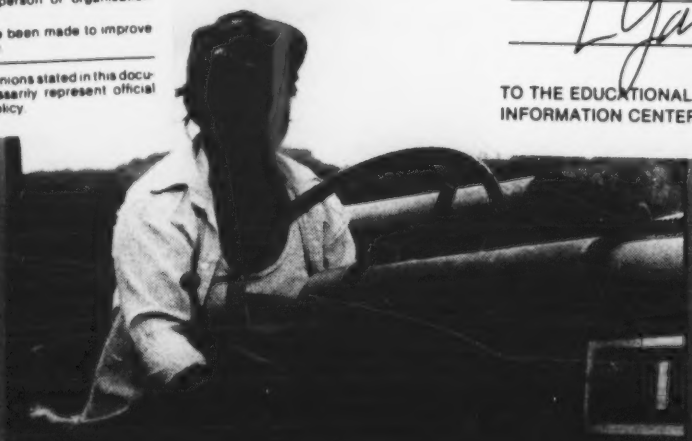

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ISBN: 0-920907-07-5

Published by: The Women's Program of the ICAE, 394 Euclid Ave., Suite 308, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6G 2S9. Tel. (416) 324-8766. Fax (416) 324-8268. Telex 986766Torwome.

"Ending the Myth of the Weaker Sex: The History of the ATC's Women's Program" by Ana Criquillón first appeared in *Terra Nuova Forum: trimestral de analisis y reflexión critica sobre el trabajo voluntario y la cooperacion internaciónal*, Año V, N 13, junio 1988.

Interviews with Heliette Ehlers and Clara Murguialday by Marie Lorenzo and Lynda Yanz

Translations by Anibal Viton

Edited by Heather Chetwynd, Marie Lorenzo and Lynda Yanz

Design and Typesetting by Sigrid Blohm

Photographs provided by the ATC

Printed in Canada

The publication of this book was made possible through the financial support of: Agricultural Missions (USA), Anglican Church of Canada, OXFAM Canada, NOVIB (Netherlands), Presbyterian Church (USA), Presbyterian Church of Canada, SIDA (Sweden),United Church of Canada.

This book is dedicated to and produced in solidarity with women farmworkers and activists in the Nicaraguan Association of Rural Workers (ATC).

THE MOON ALSO HAS HER OWN LIGHT:

It is said that the moon is bright simply because it reflects the light from the sun. In Spanish, the moon, la luna, *is feminine, whereas the sun,* el sol, *is masculine. Well we, as women, say that we have our own light. The energy of the universe belongs to all of us, and we play our part in directing it and making it more intense. What comes from us is ours; it is our interpretation of life.*

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PREFACE

A Nicaraguan woman once wrote: "We're like the ants Sandino used to talk about; when something is in our way we make a detour, but we never stop moving ahead." This typifies the reaction of organized women, not only in Nicaragua, but also in other Third World countries where women come face to face with poverty and hunger, day in and day out. The massive exploitation and oppression they face has not dashed their hopes for a more humane and egalitarian society. Nor have they been cowed by the repression they face in their efforts to move toward that cherished society.

In a few Third World countries, the complexity of the production and reproduction of such exploitive and oppressive structures has been partially resolved with the success of revolutions in which both women and men participated. However, women coming from such experiences have realized that the fight for equality with their male comrades is yet another struggle that must be waged continuously, even after victory. Women and men alike have realized that revolutions do not only mean breaking old structures and building new ones, but also transforming old patriarchal values to more humane and egalitarian relationships.

The experience of the Association of Rural Workers in Nicaragua (ATC) documented in the following pages is an important contribution towards understanding the processes of change that women and men have undergone in Nicaragua. Ten years ago, this country captured the world's attention and the imagination of freedom lovers from all over. The Sandinista Revolution was a new inspiration and in following years, stories of this determined populace were passed on to its neighbors as well as to other Third World countries. Unfortunately, the gains have been continuously threat-

ened by the US-sponsored contras, who carry out both military attacks and economic sabotage against their fellow Nicaraguans. For the all-powerful US government, the Nicarguan Revolution means not only the loss of another neo-colony, but also carries an important but dangerous message capable of fueling the desire of other neo-colonies for genuine sovereignty.

Much of what was written in the early years of revolution focused on the government's practice of land reform, its handling of the big landlords and businessmen and its unorthodox practice of pluralism. Although women were an indispensable force during the struggle against Somoza, until recently there has been little discussion of the situation of women, their organization or the changes they've undergone. This study therefore, is one important step towards accounting for women's contribution in humanizing and bringing forth a new dimension in the transformation of Nicaraguan society.

The following account is the story of how the ATC (an organization of both female and male agricultural workers) has confronted the problem of gender oppression. In many Third World countries, so-called mixed organizations seldom raise such issues. Being for the most part male-dominated, it is not surprising that such a basic problem is not acknowledged. It is therefore helpful to learn of the experience of our Nicaraguan sisters who are able to bring forward the problems of gender oppression within their organization, despite widespread machismo.

There is also a useful lesson in the relationship between the ATC and AMNLAE (the women's organization). The complementary, rather than antagonistic relationship of these two organizations exemplify the need for women, from different organizations and sectors to band together to rid their society, work places, organizations, families and themselves of a dominant patriarchal order. The debates that ensue and the processes women have to undergo in the resolution of such debates and issues is an indispensable contribution towards our understanding of the role of discussion and collective action between and among organizations, whether they be mixed or purely women's organizations.

Finally, we are shown the value popular education has in strengthening women's organizations by facilitating an incredible growth in awareness regarding their situation, on the one hand, and

on the other developing a vision as to what can be done to relieve their suffering. Indeed, Nicaraguan women face the almost impossible task of dealing with the American-backed aggressors, the difficult and painful transformation of a society in revolution and the prevailing patriarchal order, all at the same time. Understanding the role played by popular education in harnessing women's capacity to tackle such a gigantic task is invaluable for women worldwide.

This study talks about the processes Nicarguan women have undergone in their respective organizations while confronting gender oppression. Although the path Nicaraguans, and specifically Nicaraguan women, have taken is unique, there are many lessons to be learnt from their stories. In a sense, this is the Nicaraguan women's way of reaching all women, each of us involved in our respective struggles. Their message is loud and clear. In response we say: Someday, we shall prevail and win.

Carol Anonuevo
Centre for Women's Resources
Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The impetus for the Nicaraguan Association of Rural Workers (ATC) to start paying serious attention to women was quite concrete. There was an immediate and growing need to incorporate women into the jobs left vacant as more and more men were called to defend Nicaragua against US aggression. 1983, the year that "work with women" began, was also the year that saw the largest mobilization (of the male agricultural workforce) into massive defence efforts at the borders.

The result for Nicaraguan women has been similar to the experience of women in other countries ravaged by war economies over the last century; they have been "called upon" to fill the vacancies in what had until then been considered "men's work," in the cotton, tobacco and coffee fields. The difference is that this process is taking place within a revolutionary context, one in which the government is actively trying to change the relations of production to benefit the majority, and where the commitment to women's equality is official policy. The difficulty, and challenge, has been how to make that commitment a reality, especially in light of continued harassment and military aggression.

In agriculture, the transfer of jobs and responsibilities has not been easy, especially for women farmworkers. Although Nicaraguan women have always worked during the harvests and in agricultural production, they have historically been segregated into particular jobs. In 1983, for example, the majority of women lacked sufficient technical skill (and practical experience) to use the machete, an indispensible tool in the Nicaraguan harvest. And almost no women had experience in managing the more modern machinery that has been introduced in the last decade.

Not surprisingly, both working conditions and laws which protected workers had been designed with a male labour force in mind. Thus many of the problems women face at work as a result of their domestic responsibilities, reproductive role (for example the constant cycle of pregnancy and breast feeding), the ongoing need for child care, and the resulting physical exhaustion, had simply not been taken into account—certainly not by the landowners, but neither had they been addressed by the union.

The ATC was pushed to look more seriously at "the women's question" by a material change in the character of its labour force, and thus in union membership. But it was the feminist revolutionary vision and perseverence of women activists within the ATC that provided leadership and framed the particular approach to work with women farmworkers and to the union as a whole. The program's orientation was one that prioritized the development of a strong base leadership of women farmworkers, at the same time as using that process of leadership development to involve women more actively and integrally in the union. The result has been dialogue, struggle and, most importantly, change. The balance between work with women on the one hand, while at the same time not becoming isolated as separate and outside the union structure is an example for many of us.

Central to their approach is the use of popular education in the process of consciousness raising and organization of grassroots women. They have organized national assemblies, developed educational materials, acted as a catalyst by continually raising the question of women to prompt debate amongst the union membership, and they have trained women agricultural workers to take on positions of responsibility in work with women and within the union structure.

The example of the ATC extended beyond its own boundaries. It acted quickly as a catalyst for debate throughout the country in other mass organizations such as the UNAG (the association of small and medium farm producers), the CDS (the neighborhood committees), the CST (an organization which includes the majority of industrial unions), as well as within the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Perhaps the most visible impact has been on the Nicaraguan Women's Association (AMNLAE) where women in the ATC have been key participants in the re-organization of the

Nicaraguan women's movement, a process which began in 1986 and continues today. The ATC has provided an example of how to look differently at the relationship between addressing women's oppression, the development of class consciousness and building a women's movement, and at the role of the different mass organizations in this process.

One result of those debates has been a widespread attempt to break with three (mis)conceptions which predominated in the early years of the revolution: first, that the revolution had other priorities and women's issues could wait; second, that it was not the responsibility of the unions to deal with women's issues; and third, that the way to deal with women's issues was by developing a women's organization made up of women's rights activists, rather than a movement based within the working class and organized by grassroot activists within their own sector of society.

The Moon Also Has Her Own Light is a collection of analyses and reflections by women who have worked with the ATC Women's Secretariat at the different stages of conception and implementation. Ana Criquillon still works in the national office of the Women's Secretariat, while Heliette Ehlers has moved to AMNLAE's national office, and Clara Murguialday is working with women's groups in Uruguay.

The article by Ana Criquillon (published previously in Spanish, in *Terra Nuova Forum*) is the fullest and most substantial account of the program from its initiation through to the end of 1986. The testimonies by Heliette and Clara are excerpts from interviews carried out in 1985-86.* The final revisions and weaving together of testimony was done over the past year as the text was translated and passed back and forth between Nicaragua and Canada. The result represents the collective effort of many women in the ATC Women's Secretariat and the ICAE Women's Program.

Through these pages we hope to share the experience of the ATC beyond the boundaries of Nicaragua. To date there is very little known about the work of the ATC Women's Secretariat outside of Nicaragua, and by those who do not read Spanish or have

* See "Women Agricultural Workers in Nicaragua: An interview with Clara Murguialday" (*Cayenne*, Fall 1986) and "Organizing Women: Rural Women Challenge AMNLAE, An Interview with Heliette Ehlers" (*Cayenne*, Fall 1987).

access to solidarity networks. The experience is rich with lessons and insights for women and women's groups who are working in different countries and contexts to organize women, and for deepening our analysis on the relationship of women to revolutionary change and the role of education within that process. The book also represents the growing solidarity among women, not only between Central and North America, but also internationally.

The Women's Program,
International Council for Adult Education

ENDING THE MYTH OF THE WEAKER SEX:

The History of the Women's Program Within The ATC

by Ana Criquillon, ATC

It was 1983; nearly four years of revolution had passed. The sound of mortars reverberated in Jalapa, the war was escalating. Thousands of workers rallied to the war fronts. And women, who had always been regarded as "second class" workers—usually temporary labourers, but always mothers and housewives—began to increasingly appear on the payrolls. Our world was changing. State farm administrators hired women "because there were no men." They were all at the battle front. Private farmers tried to keep production going with the men who were left; some chose to discontinue parts of the production rather than hire women. But this could not stop the process of change.

Step by step, farmwork was being "feminized." The need for increasing the family income on the one hand and for increasing production at any cost on the other acted as a catalyst against the still deep-rooted prejudices. Trade unions were also undergoing changes as the number of women increased at their base. With good or ill will, and in spite of many fathers and husbands who claimed that "the union wasn't women's business," women, in ever increasing numbers, began to attend meetings and participate in the union's life, even though they were "passive, silent and discriminated against in their access to leadership positions." (Almost all the leaders of the Association of Rural Workers were men.)

In April 1983, the ATC celebrated its fifth aniversary. It decided to organize, jointly with the Nicaraguan Women's Association

(AMNLAE), the First National Meeting of Rural Working Women. Around one hundred women working in coffee, cotton, tobacco, rice and cattle farms all over the country participated in the meeting. Most of the women were leaders in production or AMNLAE's activists. The goal of the meeting was to strengthen women worker's organization and participation in the union.

The three primary objectives were:

> "To begin a consciousness raising process within the ATC around the question of women workers in order to allow ATC to set precise guidelines toward increasing women's participation in the leadership of the union."
>
> "To learn more about the reality of women workers so as to help the ATC improve its capacity to take up the problematic of women workers in the various branches of agricultural production."
>
> "To strengthen the participation of agricultural women workers within AMNLAE."

Those objectives were fully achieved. As well, the meeting ratified the need for specific and ongoing attention to women workers. Shortly after that, the union's leadership discussed and approved a three-stage project including: "a preliminary diagnosis, training of "promoters," and a phase of action-research" carried out in 30 work places.

The project interested some international government and non-government agencies already supporting Nicaragua, but there were also many concerns raised. "It's too ambitious." "It's too academic." "Why not start with the action-research phase?" "We don't support research projects, only development projects which benefit the population directly." "It's too political." Fortunately we found organizations who did want to support us and share our venture: Swissaid (Switzerland), Oxfam (Canada), Oxfam (America) and Interpares (Canada). They still had doubts, but our own conviction of being on the right track must have rubbed off on them.

At that point there was no real gender conciousness in their demands; they spoke as workers, as members of a class. But there was already something different. They were a gathering of women speaking about their problems as women workers. It was historic, for the first time the National Executive committee of the ATC glimpsed that they had been analysing, interpreting and representing the interests of the "male" workers. In fact women had many specific problems and demands that the men never raised.

We told the union leaders, "If you have in your mind that men's demands are the demands of the working class, you are dead wrong, they are only part of the demands of the working class, the male part. The female part of the working class has different demands, and if the union does not respond, women are not going to recognize the union as their *organization."*

Clara Murguialday

We started the diagnostic process in the beginning of 1984 with the help of the Centre for Agrarian Reform Research and the Ministry of Labour, both of whom were interested in the same issue though from a different perspective. Seven women grassroots leaders joined the research team. They participated in the field work and in the discussions of the data.

Our approach consisted of relating pregnancy and women's gender role at home (heads of families, wives-mothers, daughters) to their level of participation in production and in union activities. Union leaders, used to perceiving workers reality from their own—obviously masculine—point of view, suddenly had to begin seeing it through women's eyes. This process also helped to create a more receptive attitude to the conclusions of the study. After completing our investigation at a particular farm (an average stay of one week), we produced a detailed report and forwarded it to the corresponding union local. Throughout the study, many discussions arose within the union, in the research team itself and among the grassroots women, leaders and administrative personnel who were interviewed. The nature of the questions invited reflection about women's work and union life from a new perspective: that of gender.

The final report defined the division of labour according to gender as the main obstacle confronting women and also showed how that division was generated and reproduced in the family. One of our main points was that the union had to take into account the integrality of women's life conditions. The whole process was a tremendous learning experience for our team, and one that bore concrete results: many of the women grassroots leaders who worked with us are now regional union leaders and/or regional members of the Women's Secretariat.

At times we have wondered whether it was necessary to have done the research in as much detail as it was carried out, using such a large sample (60 work places, interviews with 800 women). That's a difficult question to answer. The study was the first and remains the only serious analysis of the situation of rural working women. It is an indispensable reference for any future research and will make it possible to measure further changes with certain precision. As well, given the nature of the issue, it was necessary to back our conclusions with convincing data.

One central question was whether the problems pointed to by the research study should be dealt with by the ATC, or were they more appropriately the responsibility of AMNLAE? It was a friendly and very important debate which required everyone to reflect on what the goals and responsibilities of a revolutionary trade union could or should be.

Heliette Ehlers

The research method, which integrally involved women agricultural workers in all aspects of the process, has also been seen as pioneering a different approach to investigation. It established valuable methodological patterns for future research on women's situation in other sectors. However, there were tradeoffs. More experienced teams in the three institutions involved would probably have spent a shorter time in the early stages, which would have been beneficial for all.

In early 1986 we began the second, training, stage of the project. By then we had had to modify our plans a bit. Indeed, the action-research phase had already started in several work places we had visited. As a result of our discussions, women had organized and—with the support of their union—were demanding solutions to some of their more urgent needs. At this same time we also decided to extend our work. The ATC did not want to restrict "participatory research" to 30 work places and preferred instead to promote the activities throughout its membership. In order to better coordinate this work, the "women's project" became the Women's Department, under the direction of the ATC's General Secretariat.

Thus we began a massive training process through the organization of grassroots women's workshops. The central issue for discussion in the workshops was working norms. There were some of us in the department that would have liked to get directly to the point and concentrate on the causes for the subordination of rural working women: gender division of work and its consequences, such as the double work day, exclusive responsibility for care of the children, the myth of the "weaker sex," discrimination in access to skills training and administrative and union leadership positions, etc.

But the national Executive Committee was concerned that we not separate ourselves from general union priorities. Choosing the issue of work norms responded to a major preoccupation of the union: the urgent need to increase production. At the grassroots level, men and women were already discussing the new work norms and this provided us with an excellent opportunity. Given the increasing numbers of women involved as workers it was almost impossible not to begin a reflection process on the issue from women's perspective. As women, we were facing an historic challenge: to demand lower production norms so as to be able to continue our role as mothers and housewives, but without a drop in salary; or to demand equality with men as far as norms were concerned and to struggle for the same conditions. This implied finding ways of alleviating and sharing domestic responsibilities, socializing child care through the creation of more nurseries, and assuming control over our own bodies, and our sexuality and reproductive capacity.

The first option meant institutionalizing and accepting the inevitability of the historical social role assigned to us. It meant playing into the hands of a small sector of workers who wanted to use us in order to argue that the new norms were too high and that "women could not meet them." The second implied a deeper understanding of the role of the working class in the Revolution, that as women we had to make a sincere commitment and then, strengthened by the moral authority achieved, demand equality with men in working rights, opportunities and conditions.

The debate at the grassroots level involved close to 8000 women and lasted several months. The methodology which we chose took into account the women's educational level, given the fact that only a quarter of them had reached third grade at school. We decided on a system similar to that of the literacy campaign: a simple booklet with many illustrations and little text to guide the work of the groups, and workshops to train coordinators for groups of ten women. We organized workshops for leaders of each sector (cotton, coffee, tobacco, rice and cattle), for a total of 120 women. These workshops were then reproduced in agricultural units, resulting in the training of more than 1350 coordinators who then organized workshops in more than 130 work centres.

It was by fully merging the gender interest with the class that we entered the union's power structures. We spoke the same language, engaged in the same tasks, and tackled the same problems. But we did all this through introducing a female--and more specifically, a feminist--viewpoint in that very masculine world.

Heliette Ehlers

The production of the booklet and design of the workshop program demanded a period of intense collective work, involving numerous leaders and grassroots women. It is important to note that thanks to Oxfam's support, we were able to send four women to Peru and the Dominican Republic to learn from the broad experience in popular education with women carried out by feminist centres in both countries.

In September 1986 we held a second National Assembly of Rural Working Women—three years after the first meeting—to evaluate together what we had accomplished. By that time, working with women was a special responsibility of the Women's Department. Thus our team had the responsibility of organizing the entire event. However, we were able to involve other women, both national and regional leaders. It was an important event for the ATC. There was quite a bit of scepticism about the meeting and the men of the National Executive Committee were quite nervous. No one had ever brought 600 rural working women, most of whom had never even left their homes before, to Managua for a meeting. But after many difficulties and discussions the day finally arrived. It was an emotional experience to see them, coming from all over the country, many carrying their children, on time and ready to talk about their concerns as women workers. The success of the meeting spoke for itself.

The central slogan of the Assembly was "United, Combative and Creative: Producing the Most with our Scarce Resources." It represented our spirit. We were coming to make explicit our commitment to the revolution and to add our voice and opinions about the best way to accomplish the challenge the slogan set out. Eight resolutions were adopted and delivered to the ATC's General Secretary to be incorporated into the union's global plans for 1987. The resolutions, besides expressing our commitment to production and military defence of the Revolution, included our firm decision to fight for the creation of Rural Childrens Services; for provision of basic services where needed (drinking water, collective laundries, access to the farm's corn mill for family use, dining places and prepared meals); to ensure that rural outlets had supplies of basic products (undergarments and shoes for women and children, cookware, powdered milk, sanitary napkins, etc.); for pre-natal and maternity subsidies; for paid leave to care for children's health; for more

participation in union councils; and for committees to ensure that these demands became realities.

During that year we continued to educate around the lives and demands of working women through many different vehicles. We organized several photo exhibitions; we also made a video entitled "Conditions for Happiness"; we published articles in different media on the situation of working women and the achievements made, and we publicized the resolutions from the Second Assembly through the ATC's monthly *El Machete*.

The months following the Second Assembly were decisive for several reasons. In the first place, some of our demands began to be met. The number of child care services in the country doubled; dozens of collective laundry facilities were built; many dining places and kitchens were repaired in the farms, and working conditions for cooks were improved; the number of grassroots women leaders increased significantly and many women began to hold leadership positions within the work place. Our structure also changed. After the Second Assembly, the Women's Department became the National Women's Secretariat, with regional secretariats in the four largest regions of the country.

Women's rights to employment, to pre-natal and maternity subsidies and the above mentioned conditions started to be included in collective agreements. The specialized work with women evolved little by little into a new orientation for all union work. On the other hand, within AMNLAE, we were questioning our identity as a movement, the content of our work and the most appropriate organizational structures.

March 8, 1987 marked an important milestone: the FSLN published its *Proclamation on Women*, emphasizing that "machismo is a reactionary ideology, unacceptable for any revolutionary" and that all organizations and members of the FSLN and all social, union and mass organizations bear responsibility for "promoting the massive involvement of women in the different tasks of the Revolution, of attending to their specific interests and of fighting all forms of oppression and discrimination." March 8 was also the date when AMNLAE officially reorganized its executive committee to incorporate women representing mass organizations and substantially changed its political and organizational conception. The work carried out in the ATC since 1983 now had a new

dimension. It wasn't any longer simply a joint ATC-AMNLAE project; the Second Assembly of Working Rural Women's resolutions became AMNLAE's struggle plan for the agricultural sector.

In August of the same year, we promoted assemblies with women at the grassroots level in all work centres in order to evaluate the extent to which the resolutions were being carried out. This process concluded with regional assemblies and a Third National Assembly in which 800 women participated. All leadership levels of the ATC actively participated in the preparation for the event, which illustrated the commitment of the union to our struggle for emancipation. Equality between men and women was highlighted as a decisive factor in achieving the unity of the working class. "Equality is Strength" was the central slogan. The need for the working class to establish a strategic alliance with the women's movement was raised. "Women's revolutionary thinking is making a contribution. They are searching for a society without patriarchs, without power relations between men and women, where political leadership will be such that it won't matter if it's a man or woman.

The working class is constructing socialism, we believe that the struggle against patriarchy will be a contribution at the time of defining that socialism, our own form of socialism."

Together with the undeniable advances toward democracy in the unions, where the representation of men's and women's interests are interlinked, we also confirmed substantial changes in our material working and life conditions. Many projects were going ahead—with the support of non-government organizations from different countries—skills training, building of services, health prevention and occupational health training, etc. However despite all the achievements, we also had to point to some structures which did not promote this line of work and some which, in fact, were obstacles.

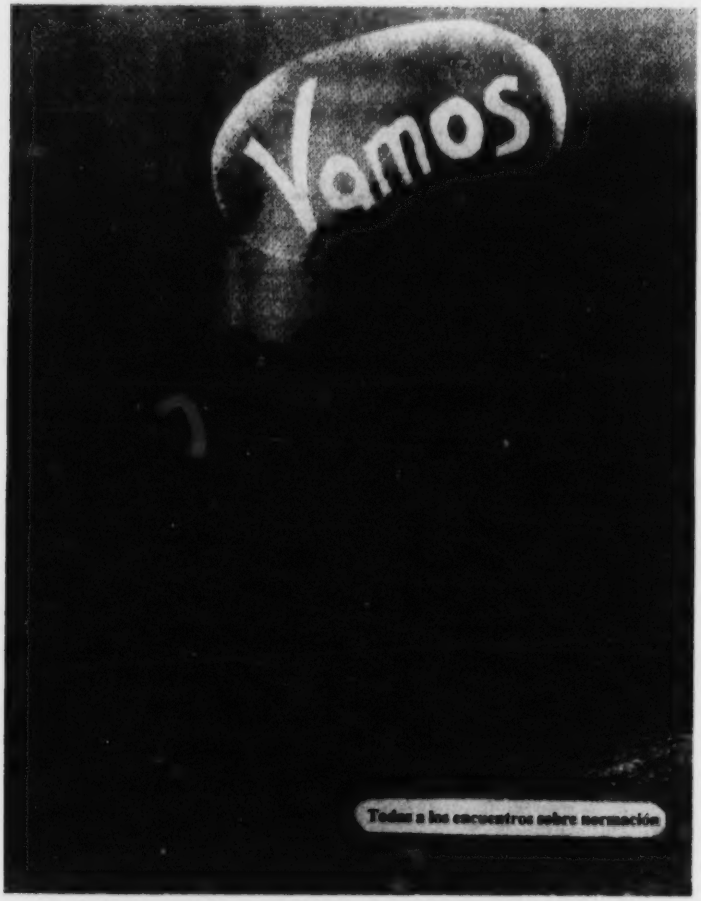
Several months have passed since the Third Assembly. This year our efforts are concentrated on the collective agreement. We are preparing a new series of meetings of grassroots women around this issue, with the goal of promoting our participation in the elaboration of the list of demands, in the negotiation of the agreements and in monitoring their fulfillment. On the other hand we want to begin a pilot program for women's training in health, sex education and family planning, which was one of the demands expressed in the resolutions of the last assembly.

The balance, in the five years since the First National Meeting of Rural Working Women, is undoubtedly positive. The objectives proposed at the initial stage are being met satisfactorily. Through the preliminary study, we acquired the information we needed on women's work, family, education and the union situation in different regions of the country. This background proved to be very valuable when we began, during the meetings on work norms, the process of self diagnosis of our most important needs and demands. These were later incorporated in the ATC's struggle plan, and became a permanent line of work for the union. We also defined strategies and policies that allowed women to begin transforming our specific working and living conditions. We strengthened our participation as a gender in the different union structures and in the administration of the country's economy. In this sense, we believe that the experience has made an important contribution to the development of the Nicaraguan union and women's movements.

It is obvious that there are still many things to do, but we believe that these achievements give us a base for moving ahead. The Swiss, Canadian and American organizations which supported our work from the beginning also reached the same conclusion. In contrast to some government organizations which put conditions on their support by maintaining permanent advisers on our team, there was an understanding that in a project of this type which contains a highly ideological and organizational component, it was better to leave it up to us to determine, step by step, the best way to carry on, and for this reason they chose instead to give us the financial support we requested. We should also note their flexibility regarding the development of the project. Indeed, the process of action-research was quite "unorthodox" in its methodology and its massive application. In this case, the improvement of the material

work and life conditions of rural workers demanded raising women's consciousness regarding their collective situation as workers and the need for being organized and participating in the union in order to achieve substantial advances. Finally, it was important to have been able to do the preliminary study before the stages of training and self-diagnosis. Research is not a common feature in labour or popular organizations. However, in this case, it was very useful to guide the following stages. We don't think it was too academic or "a waste of time"; indeed, the study probably saved us from commiting many errors in our work.

Mutual trust and sincere dialogue between the cooperating and local organizations has been one of the keys to our success. In this sense, the relationship of solidarity and the permanent support between both parts are important factors which have favoured the achievement of the objectives. And there is no doubt that it is we, the women who have gained the most.


Vamos
Todos a los encuentros sobre normación

LINKING PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION:
Popular Education in Action*

Women and children have always worked in Nicaragua, but in different jobs and conditions than the men. As temporary workers, they have done the most routine manual work, and have been the worst paid. Often women work in dangerous conditions or in jobs repugnant to men. For instance, tobacco plants are covered by worms when they are two months old and it is always women who are employed to remove them.

The politics and ideology of feminism is quite different here than in the capitalist and developed countries. Here, as in many Third World countries, our concern is not to get women into production. Women have been active in production for centuries, and not only in the countryside. Women have worked in trade since the Spanish colonization. And more recently, the involvement of women in the service sector in urban areas has been very important.

The task the Women's Secretariat took on was to organize women so they could go to the assemblies where the work norms were being revised and be able to stand up and say, "We cannot reach the established norms because we come to work everyday already tired from the work we've done at home, because of the many births we have gone through, because we don't have anywhere to leave our children, because we have to do everything at home." Or "We can't comply with the norms because we are doing work that we have never done before and so we need a lot of practice."

* Based on an interview with Clara Murguialday, ATC.

The Workshops

Our publication *Vamos* was a call to action around work norms, written from a women's perspective. It was developed for use in workshops on the norms, in order to help women workers reflect on their specific problems within the union. We wanted the women to put all these problems forward in the assemblies, so that the new norms would reflect the reality that this workforce is now fundamentally female. This was our objective.

The workshops were held with workers throughout the country, in each work centre, with all the women that work there, both permanent and temporary workers, a total of about 10,000 women. They participated in groups of 10, each with its own coordinator.

Our training method was similar to that used during the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade in 1980, which had a "multiplier" effect. Each workshop lasted one day, six hours on a Sunday. The first one was given according to the branch of production, for example coffee or cotton. The next week, these women trained women workers at the company level who the following week coordinated the workshops in each work center.

We used the methodology of "popular education." The coordinators were trained in this methodology and we synthesised the main points in a short section near the beginning of *Vamos*. They had to be very clear about their role as animator of the group.

We called the workshops "get-togethers" because women understand a workshop as an activity where someone comes, someone who is the most intelligent, the key person on the scene, and tells them what to do, while they sit and listen. A workshop wasn't always that. The word began to be used during the Literacy Crusade in order to suggest that amongst everyone we build something, collectively. But it's changed and turned into a assembly where the leader comes and gives orientations, and the rest take notes. And so a "get-together" means we get together and everyone speaks. Nobody comes to tell us what to do, we do it together.

Thousands of women agricultural workers were involved in the discussions of work norms. As a result women became more firmly integrated into the common struggle to increase production, but in addition, they began to realize that they were being discrimi-

nated against, that women were at a disadvantage. And, they discovered too that they were willing to take on the struggle to change this situation.

Using Vamos

Vamos was developed for women agricultural workers. Most of the women in the union could not read easily. They had participated in the Literacy Crusade in 1980, but many had been unable to continue studying and lost the little they had learned. So we used a lot of photos, pictures of other working women, to illustrate the questions. We reviewed the language with agricultural women workers, and adapted it to how they speak, so we could say what we wanted to but in their words. For example, we tend to use words like "complete" and "carry out," and they use other words, like "get." In small groups, women looked at the pictures, answered questions and began to discuss their own problems.

Let's look at the different sections of *Vamos* and some of the photos in it to get a better idea of how it worked:

1. Understanding Worknorms

We feel that it is important to help the people understand how the work norms are calculated. The norm is what the word says, it's something that's normal. The norm is the quantity of work that's well done, that a worker can do, not too quickly, not too slowly, in a day of work. The norms are not just what the technicians or the ATC say. They are not foreign to us. By understanding the calculation mechanism, we have more control.

(Photos 1, 2 and 3)

Here's a series of photos using the example of a weed-cutter. It's a very basic job. In the first photo, Antonia is cutting the weeds. She needs to cut half a manzana *(a land measurement equal to 1.75 acres), of weeds to make the norm. In the next photo, she has*

finished working but has only cut a quarter manzana *half the norm, and so she's going to earn half the salary. We want the women to begin to associate the amount of work with the salary.*

The third photo explains one of the characteristics of the norms; when the weeds are very thick the norms should be different, they should take into account the different characteristics of the land. Here we begin to think that if the norms take into account the land characteristics, they should also take into account the characteristics of the workforce.

2

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2. Defining our Problems

The second section is the philosphical part. What problems do we have in trying to exceed the norms?

(Photos 4 through 13)

This is a short photo-story of two women in a cotton farm. First they're in a lineup, and they're saying: We earned so little this time, in two weeks we haven't been able to reach the norms. The next month, they're on their way to the field and they begin to speak among themselves about the problems that they have in reaching the norms. They're saying: The land is so hard that picking the plants is difficult, the weeds are so tough, we aren't able to do it. The machete is not sharp, there are no files to sharpen them. So we couldn't cut very well. All these insects were everywhere biting us, because they didn't fumigate the land in time. The other women arrive late because they weren't picked up by the trailer, and they weren't able to reach the norms.

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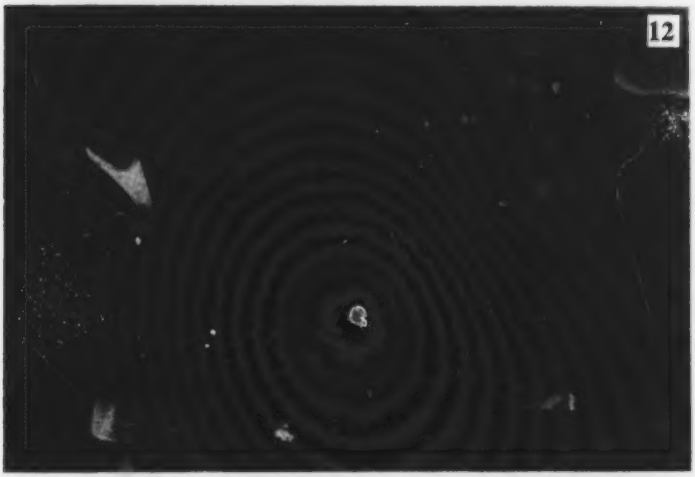

At the end of this photo-story *Vamos* asks, why weren't the workers in this photo-story able to reach the norms? So the women in the workshop reflect on the different problems that the women in these pictures have presented. The next question is where do these problems come from? Problems in this story are real problems, they're not the women's fault, they're the fault of the economic situation, the war or the company. If there are no spare parts, no insecticide, the work isn't done on time, and so on.

We want them to identify all these types of problems and see that they come from external forces. But there is a solution, and that is using their organization. So then the question is: What can we do when similar types of things happen to us? This is one of the photo-stories that helped to identify the problem.

(Photos 14 through 17)

This photo shows a housewife making tortillasat 5 o'clock in the morning. She goes out of the house at 6 in the morning, and she is already tired. She goes to pick up another friend who's sick, but she has to go to work . They get there and the union leader is saying that there are some women workers who are lazy, and who don't reach the production levels.

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(Photo 18)

In this photo a child comes to his mother and says: Mummy, Carlos got burnt. She leaves work to see what happened. So here is where the children come into the picture. This responsibility slows down the work of the women.

(Photo 19)

In this photo they are doing a job which was always done by men before. It's the first time that women have been involved in this work. They protect the tobacco by covering it with cloth. It's heavy work because they have to carry and fold huge quantities of cloth. They have to climb up and pull the cloth standing up, and then sew it. So one woman says: This is really difficult, it's hard work, I can't reach the norms. And the other one says: With all the pregnancies I've had, I don't have the strength left to do this work.

One woman says there must be some solution to all these problems. They start trying to find solutions by talking among themselves. And then the women in the workshops answer some questions. The first one is: Why are the women in this photo-story not able to reach the norms? Do the same things happen with us? How can we find a solution?

We try to identify a series of problems faced particularly by women--domestic work, sickness from being overworked and overtired, the lack of experience in specific jobs, pregnancy, the need to have one eye on work and the other on your homelife, etc. When women go into production, there are particular problems that need to be considered. We can take production into account, and how do we deal with the effects of reproductive responsibilities?

(Photos 20 and 21)

Here we present two parallel examples of women, one is the mother who has someone to take care of her children, she lives fairly close to her work place, she's young and strong, she does her work and says: I can stay and work a couple of hours more to get the bonus and increase production.

(Photos 22 and 23)

The other woman has had eight children, and she doesn't have the same strength. In addition, she's doing a type of job that's destroying her hands, putting on the fertilizers; she doesn't use a container or gloves, and so it starts to cause wounds on her hands. She also lives a long way from work and has to walk, she has left her children alone and so she's worried. When this woman finishes the norm, she says: OK, I've finished, bye. She doesn't stay to exceed the norms. She makes just enough to get the food she needs.

The conclusion is that if we want the norms to work in the case of women, certain problems must be resolved. If these problems are not dealt with, production will not be increased.

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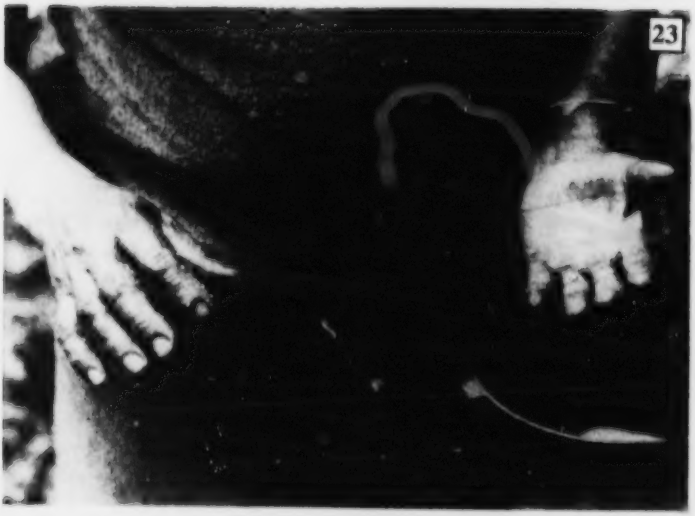
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3. Searching for solutions

What can we do to alleviate the workload, to make it easier and less time-consuming? We want to make it very clear in the women's minds that it's not a problem of biology, or natural condition, but rather a social and cultural problem, and that there are solutions. We're proposing new social conditions so that work is easier.

(Photo 24)

The women workers struggled to get this day care centre. It's very beautiful and has nice cribs.

(Photo 25)

This is another day care centre. It is thrown together with minimal resources. They've made hammocks for children out of bags. The woman responsible for this day care centre is saying how women with consciousness are now able to double their norms. If we can increase productivity, we'll have the resources to improve our day care centres.

(Photo 26)

Here they've got collective grinding facilities on a state farm. The women grind corn there to make tortillas. This woman says: Before, we had to wake up at 2 o' clock in the morning to grind the corn, now we get up at 4 or 5 and its sufficient. The collective service makes the work much quicker.

(Photo 27)

This man is a union member, and a militant of the FSLN. This is a very interesting testimony, very challenging. He says that it's necessary for women to work in agriculture, and so it isn't correct that all the domestic work be left for women. Since they share our work, since they work in the fields, we have the duty and the right to share the work at home. So here you see the whole family together, and he is peeling potatoes, the type of job that no man ever does at home.

An Ongoing Struggle

If we want the work norms to apply to women, we have to address women's particular problems, the reality they live each day. If these problems are not solved, production won't increase. That's what we kept saying to the leadership. We stressed that it was the responsibility of the union (with women's participation) and not AMNLAE (the women's association) to confront these issues. It is not a matter of solidarity amongst women, but rather an issue to be solved by the union and its members.

A woman's capacity to comply with pre-set work norms has a lot to do with her family life, or in other words her reproductive life. And so when making plans around work norms, the ATC has had to learn to take into account, for example, the impact of women's double day. We have to realize that in some cases it becomes necessary to adjust the norms for some women, for example pregnant women. In other cases this means demanding more (or different) social benefits from the company. And of course, taking all this seriously means, finally, that it is the union's responsibility to get involved in convincing men to share in domestic work.

Women work in the productive and reproductive realm at the same time. The challenge for the union right now is to understand this strategically. Men's first and priority demand is usually a salary raise, often so that they can afford to drink more, and there's too much drinking in the countryside. In contrast, women's first demands tend to be different, to have a health centre close by, or for a child care service where they can leave their children when they go to work, or to have basic foodstuffs assured so they don't have to travel so far (often up to twenty hours) to get them. Women ask for the things that will help alleviate their work load at home.

Child care is an important issue in the private sector, and we, as popular leaders are obliged to demand it. In the State-controlled sector it is different: they have had to set an example, although it has not been done too willingly. In many places there are now government-run day care centres, and all workplaces have at least some provisions for child care. So in these work centres there are no problems with mothers because their children are being well taken

care of. Children have balanced meals, they are kept clean and in good health, and there is less chance that they will get sick. But since the majority of our workers are employed by private companies, these benefits are generally not available.

We are searching for ways to convince men to feel that participation in domestic life is not only women's responsibility. For instance, we say that a child care centre is a good one if both men and women attend the meetings to talk about children's problems. There is a problem if only women participate. We believe that the best centres are those who take on educating not only the children but the family as a whole, where women have been able to bring men to the meetings so that they begin to see what child care issues are. There are some centres where men have begun attending. They are very shy at first because it is a woman's environment, and they feel apart, but they are beginning to come in.

To get men to participate in domestic work is a very delicate matter. Men have always been masters in the home and women their submissive slaves. The woman has traditionally accepted all that the man says. They both leave work for home at the same time, but she has to continue working, preparing dinner, doing the laundry, etc. This has not been valued as work by the husband, even though he reaffirms his love for her. By his actions he demonstrates that he is not conscious of her sacrifice.

Our view is that the union has to take these kind of demands and propose a system of social benefits to make work more easy. For instance, should the demand for children's services be women's concern only? Are women the only ones interested in this? We propose that the union, men and women, struggle together for rural child care services. In this way we say that women's demands must be in the forefront as demands of the union as a whole.

REFLECTING ON THE PROCESS*

Women and the Women's Secretariat have become important bastions in the ATC. The union has recognized that there are moments when working women must be acknowledged in order to strengthen the consciousness of all workers. Although the Women's Secretariat is still in its infancy, much has been achieved. The proportion of women in the ATC has increased from 40 to 52 percent in the last two years. And these women have begun to organize themselves in order to get day care, children's lunches, collective grinding facilities, collective laundry areas, drinking water, etc. from the company, as well as technical training, and union courses from the union.

Perhaps the most important achievements have occurred inside the union itself. At the beginning, when you went to an assembly, the person chairing the assembly was always a man; the leadership were all men regardless of the number of women present. The few men that were there were in high positions, and were the most qualified ones in terms of both production and union status. Now, each day there are more women in the union assemblies; some assemblies are entirely women. With the recent union elections there have also been some important changes. For instance, in the tobacco industry, where women are the majority, the union leadership is now more proportionate, with about two to three out of five members being women. This is much more balanced than before..

The union is now interested in solving women's problems because they know that women are on the front line in productivity. If they can go further than the norm, then men will have to pair up

* Based on an interview with Heliette Ehlers, ATC.

with them. But in order for women to go beyond the norm, we have to give them benefits. Current union plans include fighting with the companies so that they consider including benefits, such as child care centres, laundry areas, drinking water and technical training, as part of their production investment. These are beginning to be considered not as social benefits but rather as production costs.

In collective agreements, clauses dealing with the interests of working women have been included, such as pre- and post-natal subsidies, paid leave when children are sick, medical examinations for working women, etc. This is new in the negotiations, and sometimes turns out to be very difficult especially with private employers. But women and men in the union are standing firm.

Challenging the Women's Movement

During the period of reorganization within the ATC, AMNLAE provided us with logistical support. But the "personal" struggle to convince men on the one hand, and on the other convince women of their right to formulate their own demands, rested upon the creativity of ATC women with a feminist consciousness. What we were doing in the ATC was being done, with variations, by women in other organizations. For someone who didn't know the situation well, it might have appeared that we were working in coordination with each other. But this work was outside the range of what had been the traditional role of AMNLAE, and it was based on the need to do something to change the situation. Because really as a women's movement, we did not have a clear profile.

When AMNLAE was originally conceived, its primary idea was that women should participate in building and defending the revolution in all its tasks. But AMNLAE wasn't needed for that; women were participating whether AMNLAE was there or not. Its fundamental task should have been to identify the basic limitations to women's equal participation, not to solve them, but to facilitate a reflection on the problems by women themselves until they can resolve them for themselves. In the past, AMNLAE has not able to conduct this kind of reflection. It did not take on this role.

We are not interested in AMNLAE doing work from outside the sectors, without being part of them. This discussion is still going on and has provoked internal debates within women's groups. The debate revolves around what the nature of a mass women's organization should be. Many say that women need our very own organization where we can discuss our own issues in order to transform our ideology. And others say, we do have to reflect on these issues by ourselves, but in order to act within each sector we have to have a space inside it, not be separated. We have to have an organized voice, AMNLAE, but we have to be involved where men are too. That is where we do our ideological work with them, within the organization, not outside it. What good does it do for women to overcome the ideological problems of our subordination if it does not result in a change in men's attitudes?

Sectoral work with women has broken with the traditional conception of AMNLAE and has begun to be heard strongly in our debates. AMNLAE has started to change. Certainly the present participation of the ATC on AMNLAE's National Executive is based on that belief. AMNLAE is beginning to facilitate a women's movement presence, a presence that women in the labour force in all sectors can all call their own. Women need to feel that our problems won't be solved by AMNLAE, but that we can resolve them ourselves within our own different sectors.

At the same time, AMNLAE must develop sufficient strength to confront the State and say: "This position taken by the government discriminates against women." "That law hurts women." or "We need this or that law." In other words, AMNLAE must come from and be the voice of women, coming from a position of power.

Nicaraguan women's potential for struggle has increased and what we need to do is search for ways to go forward. We don't agree with wearing people down by useless internal discussions. People who think that you have to always agree are being too rigid. We have a democratic framework which makes it possible to contribute ideas and styles which are sound until they are proven wrong. This is an ideological battle and Nicaraguan women are fighting against established patterns. AMNLAE should be the axis of power in the movement, but this is an ideal that we must transform into reality.

Learning How to Organize Women

We have been breaking away from tradition, although it is a slow process. Sometimes we feel as if there were no movement, but suddenly we feel we are moving; then things go slowly, and then we are moving again.

In these years, we've achieved a considerable amount. We've gone through periods of victory as well as defeat. But instead of weakening us, our defeats have made us search for new methods, review our faults, improve our work and advance even further. We didn't begin our work with a defined strategy. On the contrary, to a great extent we have worked intuitively.

The development of our work within the ATC was influenced by several things. First of all, we were working with a specific group, the working class in the countryside, and we did our research from within that group in order to fully get to know the situation of the women. Secondly, we had great respect for popular education methodology, particularly when working with women. Women tend to talk less than men and, in general we have difficulties in analyzing our own situation. Also, we have been quite self-critical which has pushed us to study more, to analyze and be open to other people's experiences.

We also began by addressing the social environment--the work place--first. We found that this opens a door to the private life, the family life. For instance, a rural woman, in order to be able to attend a union meeting must first have a skirmish with her husband to get him to take care of the children. It isn't the opposite, she is not going to argue with him first and then decide to go to the meeting. First she will want to go to the meeting and that is what will produce the fight with her husband.

The private life is the most difficult to reach, especially in the union. Supposedly the union should not meddle in anyone's private life. But we have to do away with this assumption. In all our work we have learned that women are breaking out of this family prison in order to participate in and work for the revolution.

One of the first things we had to learn was that for a female worker what happens in the house and what happens in the field are intimately related. A female worker doesn't think--now I'm a

worker and a producer, now a housewife, a wife, a mother. You can't be divided into two. But unfortunately, until now the union has fostered this kind of separation; it has dealt with the production area and hasn't wanted to know anything about women's home life. Now we're turning that around and proposing to the ATC that what happens to women in the productive realm depends on her role in the reproductive realm.

This has been one of the main focuses of our work, that the discrimination and marginalization women experience in production is integrally related to their role at home. We know that as long as women are considered the secondary workforce, and working outside the home is seen as a secondary task, people won't consider them able to do certain types of work year round and won't think about training them.

Some people have told us that we began backwards, starting from production and then leading into reproduction. But we were clear about that. With agricultural working women it was easier to go this way, to start from their experience of work and move to the more difficult issue of the personal.

Changing Men's Consciousness

Little by little we are gaining men's respect. We are now able to tell them that they have to be sensitive about this issue, that they must recognize how important it is, because sometimes they joke about hiring a lawyer to solve their problems with their spouses. Sometimes they are annoyed because they really only love themselves and do not realize how hard it is for women.

There is still a lot of resistance. We've had centuries of learning to be this way and there's a lot of fear about changing. We have to change the ways we work and the way we think, and this means transforming our ideology. We know that the debate isn't over. People still have difficulty understanding that women and union are not contradictory, that it is the opposite: this unity makes us stronger.

We were always clear that it wasn't a good tactic to confront, to openly and totally clash. It is not the isolated gesture or the strong word or protest that makes things change, but rather organized

action carried out collectively. It's an approach that requires patience and organization, even at home. Women had to learn not to be too aggressive at home. In the countryside they were not used to doing things in a diplomatic fashion, they just go right ahead and this does not produce any results. We have to try to understand our husbands, to dialogue with them. And men, on their part, have to understand why women want to participate, they have to learn to recognize their role. This is a daily struggle.

Our non-aggressive attitude made the union leadership lower its guard, lose its fear, although it did not overcome the fierce resistance of those who were, perhaps the most revolutionary but also the most backward on the issue of women's liberation. This is a fact that needs to be brought out in the open: there are many revolutionary women and men who are willing and able to give their life for liberation, for social justice, for socialism, and they are an example to all of us. But at the same time they resist seeing the reality of subordination and discrimination of at least 50 percent of the world's population--women--and they don't fight to change this. In a country in revolution, this is the contribution of women to the process of constructing socialism. To be a complete revolutionary is a challenge in Nicaragua.

Many of our comrades still tell us that talking about women's needs and demands is selfish at this stage when we have to take up the defense of our country. But the National Directorate of the FSLN endorsed what we have been fighting for. We know that we must work on the issue of women's rights now, not a hundred years from now.

Related Resources from the ICAE Women's Program

We Are AMNLAE. An interview with Patricia Lindo, of the Nicaraguan Women's Association.

by Deborah Barndt, 1985, 48pp.

"We think of education as a guide for action, not an end in itself. We never transmit a message without proposing a concrete task or action related to it.... It is from the women themselves that we gather our ideas...because we are totally united by women, with women. It is women who carry out the work, who bring so much enthusiasm and clarity to the task, who know that this is what must be done to save the revolution." A reflection of the early years of revolution, this interview illustrates how popular education and participatory research were used to build the Nicaraguan women's movement, and to mobilize women to participate and raise their voices in the social reconstruction.

An Enormous School Without Walls: Nicaraguans Educating for a New Society.

by Heather Chetwynd, 1989, 46pp.

"There are many terms used to define the New Education in Nicaragua: popular, insurrectional, democratic and participatory; scientific, integrated and ongoing; liberating and anti-imperialist." Heather Chetwynd, a former CUSO cooperant with the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education, presents an overview of New Education and looks at how "it will form free, responsible, critical persons who are their own masters, but also in solidarity with the collective destiny."

The First Steps: Adult Popular Education in Nicaragua.

by Heather Chetwynd, 1989, 16pp.

In 1980 the world's attention was drawn to Nicaragua by the impressive results of the National Literacy Crusade. Although much has been written about the Crusade, there are few accounts of the subsequent growth of adult education in the country. This book assesses the development of the Nicaraguan Adult Education Program over the past nine years.

From Bonding Wires to Banding Women. Proceedings of the International Consultation on Micro-Chip Technology, Manila, Philippines, 1986.

by the Center for Women's Resources and the Participatory Research Group, 1988, 67pp.

This book documents the highlights of a meeting in Manila co-sponsored by the Center for Women's Resources, the Women's Center and the Kilusan Manggagawang Kababaihan-KMK (Women Workers' Movement) all based in Manila, and the ICAE Women's Program and the Participatory Research Group in Toronto. The book includes testimonies of women workers and activists from factories in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and offices in Canada and the US, as well as analyses of the global context, local strategies for fighting back and regional and international networking.

Testimonios. A Guide to Oral History.

by Margaret Randall, 1985, 43pp.

A practical guide to the use of oral history as a tool for strengthening individual and collective identity in struggles for social transformation, based on workshops conducted by the author in revolutionary Nicaragua. Testimonios examines the relationship between people's testimony and recorded history, and covers interviewing techniques, the use of photographs and graphics, montage and evaluation of the aesthetic value of the finished work.

Voices Rising: A Bulletin about Women and Popular Education.

Voices Rising is the central networking tool of the ICAE Women's Program, and aims to promote the sharing of experiences, provide a forum for discussion and debate of key issues for women, share information on useful resources, and promote the development of feminist practice in adult education. Voices Rising is published twice yearly in English, Spanish and French.

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THE MOON ALSO HAS HER OWN LIGHT: The Struggle to Build a Women's Consciousness Among Nicaraguan Farmworkers, is the first in a series of case studies on popular education for women written by educators and activists based in different regions of the world, and published by the ICAE Women's Program. The Women's Program links educators and organizers in different regions of the world who are working to develop education as a tool for social change and the empowerment of women. The case studies aim to contribute to the sharing of experiences and strategies and to foster the development of a feminist practice in popular education which makes connections between broad social struggles and the personal issues and oppression women face in their daily lives. Forthcoming publications in the series include case studies by the Center for Women's Resources in the Philippines and by Honor Ford-Smith of the Sistren Theatre Collective in Jamaica.

Cover photograph by Sonia Mayorga Salablanca for the ATC

ISBN: 0-920907-07-5

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$6.50